

OAKLAND, N.S.

Everyone knows about the Avro Arrow, a ghost back in the news in association with the proposed sale of de Havilland to Boeing. The Arrow was a supersonic jet fighter, advanced for its time, that was put to death by the Conservative government in 1959. The government put money ahead of national pride, a rich heritage, and the future national good in that the killing of the program — the Arrow is always referred to as having been killed — resulted in the dispersal of skilled designers and engineers, mainly to the United States. A true account? Or myth, renewed — not to suggest malicious distortion — out of ignorance and an unwillingness to look up the record?

Let's take Tom Axworthy, Pierre Trudeau's former principal secretary, as only a convenient example. Axworthy wrote, in a recent Sunday piece in the Toronto Star: "From the CF-100 (predecessor of the Arrow) to the Dash 8, from Billy Bishop to the northern bush pilots, Canadians have flown world-class aircraft. John Diefenbaker reneged on that heritage by killing the Avro Arrow. Now Brian Mulroney wants to sell the indus-

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try out to foreigners."

The first part of that is lump-in-the-throat rubbish. Of course, Canadians, including Billy Bishop and the bush pilots, flew world-class aircraft; most of them were British-or American-designed, and, most often, built. About Diefenbaker's going back on this rich heritage, let's have a look at Howe, a biography of C. D. Howe, Liberal minister of just about everything in commerce and production in the Second World War, and after, until 1957. Howe is by Robert Bothwell and William Kilbourn.

"He had no confidence," they wrote, "in the A. V. Roe Company, either in its management or in its ability to stay within agreed costs. If the air force had to have a supersonic fighter, let the government contract the work 'to a British firm which has the personnel, equipment and experience that qualifies them to do work of this kind.' It went without saying that such work would be performed 'for a fraction of the cost' of A. V. Roe's product."

However, the then defence minister, Brooke Claxton, pre-

vailed and the Arrow program was begun. Howe, in 1955, told the House of Commons apropos the Arrow, "We have started on a program of development that gives me shudders." And, said the authors, "As the cost of the CF-105 climbed... Howe's shudders increased." Then, this: "Attempts to sell the CL-105 to the Americans and British were unavailing; both Canada's allies expressed interest, admiration — and polite regret. *But it was not until the spring of 1957 that the cabinet's defence committee bowed to the obvious: The Arrow would be cancelled — after the next election.*"

The 1957 election cancelled the Liberal government first; bowing to the obvious was left to its successor. Donald Fleming, Conservative finance minister at the time, wrote, in his recent political memoirs, of a meeting of the Canada-U.S. Joint Defence Committee that took place in Paris in December, 1958: "The last subject on the agenda... was the Arrow program. John Foster Dulles, the U.S. Secretary of State, led the American delegation (with) Bob Anderson,

Secretary of the Treasury... I earnestly presented the merits of the Arrow (and) the tragedy which its discontinuance would inflict on the Canadian aircraft industry... if the United States would not buy the plane. At the conclusion of my plea, I asked, 'Will the United States buy Arrow planes?' Bob Anderson replied, briefly, decisively, and finally, 'No.'... There was no room left for argument or further persuasion."

This was no secret. Next day, The Globe and Mail story from Paris, different in who said what to whom, began: "Defence Minister (George) Pearkes today received an answer from U.S. Defence Secretary McElroy that seems to give the final blow to the Avro Arrow. This is the situation now: The U.S. does not want the aircraft even with cost reduced by substitution of already-developed U.S. equipment for the Canadian Astro fire-control system and Sparrow missile. That was Mr. McElroy's answer today and it left no hope." I wrote it. The Arrow died Feb. 20, 1959.

The story of the dastardly deed done the Arrow is bushwa, lovingly-nurtured mythology — and utterly irrelevant to Boeing-de Havilland.